



Cypress tree, left of center, stands at the location of the spring house.  
Hill on right was site of Mulberry Hill buildings. The small stream  
is a branch of Beargrass Creek. 1991 photograph by Ernest Ellison.



1. Letter of William Clark to Jonathan Clark, Mulberry Hill, March 2, 1802. Jonathan Clark Papers, Temple Bodley Collection, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

2. Letter of William Clark to Jonathan Clark, Louisville, April 5, 1802, Ibid.

The photographs, except the last, are from the Thruston Collection, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

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THE CLARK FAMILY HOME  
AT LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



Prepared for the  
**Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation**

by **Ernest M. Ellison**  
**Louisville, Kentucky**

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## THE CLARK FAMILY HOME AT LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



John and Ann Clark, their family, and servants left their home in Caroline County, Virginia, October 30, 1784, to begin their journey down river at Red Stone Old Fort. The roads were difficult, the weather inclement, and the Monongahela was choked with ice. They stayed in Pittsburgh for the winter and resumed their journey in spring. They encountered a party of Native Americans near the mouth of the Kentucky River on the 3rd of March and later learned of a fatal attack with destruction of a friend's house in the area. They were driven by anticipation of the opportunities in the new land and reunion in the west with their son, George Rogers Clark.

The children of John and Ann Clark accompanying their parents on this difficult journey were William, fourteen years of age, and their three daughters, Lucy, nineteen, Elizabeth, sixteen, and Frances Eleanor (Fanny), almost twelve.

Their son George Rogers had obtained settlement rights to 400 acres with options rights to 100 adjoining acres in the present county of Shelby for their home site. It was about 25 miles east of Louisville, and they considered it too far from Clark's headquarters at the Falls of Ohio. A second tract of 256 acres on Beargrass Creek was then acquired for their home.

By the time the Clark family moved to Kentucky, the town of Louisville was established but struggling, having received charter from Virginia in May, 1780. Over 100 log cabins were inhabited, and several frame houses in various states of completion were in evidence. The first retail store was, by 1785, two years old; and a large quantity of goods was being received down the river from Philadelphia. A school had been started as early as 1782.

On June 23, 1921, a deed was recorded noting the transfer of the approximately 44 acres from the Federal government to the Board of Park Commissioners of the City of Louisville. The land was purchased by R.C. Ballard Thruston\*, S. Thruston Ballard, and the family of their deceased brother, Charles T. Ballard. The brothers presented the park to the city as a memorial in commemoration of the achievement of George Rogers Clark.



The buildings of Mulberry Hill as they stood in 1911.  
These buildings were demolished during World War I when  
Mulberry Hill became part of Camp Zachary Taylor.

*\*R.C. Ballard assumed his mother's family name in 1884.*



Comparison of the photographs Thruston made in 1890 of the complete house as well as those he made in October 1907 and in 1911 indicate that the structure was not entirely torn down by 1911.

The entire second floor was removed, along with the southwest portion of the first floor, leaving the northeast portion of the first floor to be used for the wagon shed. Several structures clustered near the log house appear in Thruston's photographs. He refers to them only as the outbuildings. The Mulberry Hill tract was a productive farm for several generations, and it is probable that these outbuildings were added over the years as required. When Mr. Thruston visited in 1911, the buildings were surrounded by a cornfield; he photographed the tenants then living on the farm.

Another early Filson Historical Society member, Alfred Pirtle, tells of a visit to Mulberry Hill in 1916 that illustrates the rapid decline of the buildings since Mr. Thruston's photographs of 1911:

*"Having come over the summit of the second hill since we came on this road, we halt a moment while someone opens a private gate on the right hand side of the pike, which gives us an entrance into a pasture. About four hundred yards away, we note a one-story brick building, to the right of which is a small frame house, which appears to be a stable, and which on nearer approach is also a portion of a wagon shed. It is to see this old dilapidated building that we came into this dairyman's grounds, for this is what remains of Mulberry Hill."*

In December, 1917, Mr. Pirtle brought a piece of a log from the house to be added to the Filson Historical Society collection. It was taken from the part of the house used as a wagon shed that stood until November, 1917, when the remaining buildings of the frontier plantation were demolished and the last trace of one of the most significant historic homes of America was lost.

In June of that year, Camp Zachary Taylor, an Army training camp, was established on land that included Mulberry Hill. The spring house was demolished and the spring was filled in, but a large cypress tree remains to mark the location of the spring.

Jonathan, older brother of George Rogers Clark, mentioned in his diary November 3, 1783, of coming to Louisville but said nothing of the Mulberry Hill site. He did record that on December 17, 1783, he was surveying on Beargrass Creek. Tradition in the Clark family descendants is that Jonathan had come to Kentucky to build the home for the John Clark family. Another tradition survived for years with other members of the family that a group of African-Americans came out of Kentucky from Virginia in 1782 to begin clearing the land for the home. John Clark was not the first owner of the home site.

A deed dated August 29, 1785, from the estate of John Meriwether to John Clark, Sr. of Jefferson County, of "a parcel of land, in Jefferson County, on waters of Beargrass Creek, north side of south fork of said creek, 256 acres" is recorded in Jefferson County deed book 1. "The house was a two-story log house with two rooms below and two rooms above, each separated by a wide hall, with two more rooms in the attic. The house faced the Northwest and there were large stone chimneys at each end. The home was unusually large for Louisville then and considered to be one of the finest estates in the area."

Mr. Temple Bodley, a great-great-grandson of Jonathan Clark, gave that description of Mulberry Hill in his biography of George Rogers Clark. He further states that the property was about a square mile of land overlooking the town of Louisville, about four miles from Fort Nelson at the Falls of the Ohio. The house had a large pantry and storerooms in the rear, a small front porch and a larger back one. The quarters for the slaves and springhouse were well built of brick and stone, and the kitchen was a small separate brick structure. The residence and kitchen were surrounded by a plank fence that also enclosed many large trees. Reaching for less than half a mile from the residence to the public road was an avenue lined with locust trees on each side of a carriage way and foot path.

Mulberry Hill had been under the stewardship of William, Jonathan, or Isaac during the period of great plantation development, the results of which were still visible in the late 19th Century. Its lands had been expanded and several buildings had been added since the original abode

of John and his family in the 18th Century. The photographs of the house by Mr. Thruston in 1890 suggests that modifications of the house were made over the years.

The three Clark girls who came to Louisville with their parents were married at Mulberry Hill, and the Clark home became a social and cultural center for the rapidly-growing community. Lucy Clark married Major William Croghan on July 14, 1789. Their home was Locust Grove, built about 1790, where George Rogers Clark lived the last years of his life with his sister.



Mulberry Hill, from near the spring house about 1890.  
The cypress tree, right, is still standing. Beyond the crest of the hill, the long building on the left is the rear of the log house. The center building is the southeast end of the "brick row" (slave quarters).

Frances Eleanor Clark married Dr. James O'Fallon in February, 1791. They lived at Mulberry Hill with her parents, and on November 17, 1791, her first child was born, John O'Fallon, later of St. Louis, Missouri.



View of the "old John Clark cabin" made by Mr. Thruston about 1890.  
As late as 1880, a great-great-grandson of Jonathan Clark, William Bodley Pierce, was born at Mulberry Hill. The smoke house is to the left rear.

several photographs of the "old John Clark cabin." Mrs. Thruston is seated on the porch in the photograph of the house. Written on a copy of this photograph in the Filson Historical Society collection and signed by Thruston is this statement: "to the left of the cabin can be seen a part of the old brick smoke house which was near one end of the low brick row in which the slaves were quartered. When I last visited Mulberry Hill in October, 1907, the cabin had been torn down and the few logs that were still sound enough had been used in the construction of a wagon shed." These comments are dated April 30, 1909.

The location and type of construction of the building that Mr. Thruston referred to as the smoke house could very well have been the kitchen. It was customary to remove the kitchen from the living quarters to reduce the risk of fire and to escape the heat generated in warmer times of the year.

first permanent home. Mr. Thruston's private library, manuscripts, collections of artifacts, and hundreds of photographic negatives he made are a major part of the Filson Historical Society's resources.

On August 26, 1894, Mr. Thruston wrote to William H. English, biographer of George Rogers Clark, regarding Mulberry Hill. He stated that the old cabin was still standing but in a badly dilapidated condition. It was at one time attacked by Indians and the logs were full of bullet holes. Relic hunters had cut out many of the bullets and Mr. Thruston



In this view of the "brick row" (slave quarters), the house is about 40 feet to the left of the brick building Mr. Thruston identifies as the smoke house.

promised to send English one. Mr. Thruston also mentioned that during a recent visit to Mulberry Hill burial ground, he failed to find the graves of John Clark and his wife Ann Rogers.

Mr. Thruston tells of a visit to Mulberry Hill in about 1889 or 90. His mother accompanied him, and it was during their visit that he made

The day of his birth, Fanny's cousin, William Clark, son of Benjamin Clark died and was buried at Mulberry Hill, the first in the family cemetery. The second of Frances Eleanor's marriages was to Captain Charles M. Thruston, Jr. Their son, Charles William, was the grandfather of Rogers Clark Ballard Thruston.

Elizabeth Clark married Colonel Richard Clough Anderson August 14, 1787. Their residence was called Soldier's Retreat, a handsome stone structure with walls said to be 4 feet thick. It was situated on Beargrass Creek about ten miles east of Louisville.

Ann Rogers Clark, their mother, died on December 24, 1798, and her husband John died in August, 1799. Both were buried in the family burial ground at Mulberry Hill. General George Rogers Clark retired to Mulberry Hill when he left military service. He remained there until he built his permanent home at Clarksville, Indiana Territory, in 1802. Much involved in the allocation of lands in the Illinois grant, he built a mill near his home site in 1784 and had begun to write a military history of his 1778-79 campaign.

William inherited Mulberry Hill under the will of his father, John, probated October 11, 1799. William also received the livestock, utensils, household furnishings, and debts due except money due from Charles M. Thruston. In addition, William was bequeathed "one Negro man named York, also his wife Rose and their two children, Nancy and Juba, also three old Negroes, Tom, Cupid, and Harry." William also received Illinois Grant lands and other Kentucky lands owned by his father.

William was actively engaged in assisting his brother George manage his fiscal affairs, traveling extensively in his behalf, and in operating the homestead. He also represented the family's interest in their vast holdings in the West and was a responsible citizen of the community. March 2, 1802, William wrote to brother Jonathan in Virginia giving his news of the neighbors, property transactions in the area, and a progress report on the construction of Jonathan's new home on a nearby farm, later known as "Trough Spring." William had selected a location for the house, but he told Jonathan that "Brother George had selected a more preferable site." William wrote that he would begin construction the following Monday,



and he assured Jonathan that he would have every comfort possible and requested arrival time so he could meet him on the river. William further stated that he had recently “raised” a school to accommodate 25 students, but felt that as many as 60 scholars could be made up.<sup>(1)</sup>

A month later William reported to Jonathan that he was expected out in June and that he would have a house and a garden for him by that time. William felt fortunate in having sawed the greater part of the planks for Jonathan’s house, because he wrote that his mill dam is “entirely broken”.<sup>(2)</sup>

By December, 1802, William was settled in Clarksville. Jonathan having come to Kentucky in 1802, purchased 232 acres of Mulberry Hill from William on May 7, 1803, and upon his death in 1811, the estate was divided among his heirs, and Isaac received the Mulberry Hill home.



The Ballard and Thruston families during a visit to Mulberry Hill October 14, 1907. Mr. Thruston wrote that the bullet holes could be seen in the logs. Indian attacks were common in the outskirts of Louisville away from Fort Nelson. They culminated in a final massacre of settlers about 10 miles east of Mulberry Hill in 1789.

Jonathan was buried at Mulberry Hill in 1811, his wife Sarah in 1818, sons John in 1802 and Isaac in 1868. Edmund Clark, the fifth son, came to Kentucky with Jonathan in 1802. He became a trustee of the young town of Louisville and was elected clerk. Edmund purchased 100 acres of the Mulberry Hill tract as well as other lands but was not successful as a planter. He died March 11, 1815, and was buried in the family burial ground at Mulberry Hill.

Isaac was a planter on the Mulberry Hill property until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. At 76 years of age, he decided that he could not cope with the new system without slaves and moved to town to live with his brother, Dr. William Clark, who had been a practicing physician.

Isaac bequeathed 61 acres of his home place including the house to Dr. Clark with the reservation of one acre for burial purposes. Mr. Thruston indicated that the burial ground was about 100 yards from the house. Three months following Isaac’s burial at Mulberry Hill in January 1868, Dr. Clark acquired a lot in Cave Hill Cemetery that had opened in 1848. Dr. Clark and Isaac had often discussed their desire to reinter the remains of George Rogers Clark and their parents to that location. The lot was placed in the name of Isaac. He removed the remains of Captain Edmund Clark, General Jonathan Clark and his wife Sarah Hite Clark and their two sons John Hite Clark and Isaac Clark from Mulberry Hill Cemetery. They were reinterred in Cave Hill on October 29, 1869, along with the remains of General George Rogers Clark from Locust Grove. The remains of John Clark, his wife Ann Rogers and their grandson William Clark were not moved, because of the uncertainty of their location and the length of time since their burial.

We are indebted to Mr. Rogers Clark Ballard Thruston for information and photographs of Mulberry Hill. Mr. Thruston, a Yale graduate, was a geological engineer who joined the Filson Historical Society in 1892, only eight years after the founding of the organization. In 1909, he retired from a professional career and dedicated the rest of his life to study, research, travel, and the Filson Historical Society. He served as its president from 1923 until his death in 1946 and was responsible for its